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ABSTRACT

Social class influences parent involvement in schooling. This book uses the case study method to compare family-school relationships in a working-class elementary school with those in an upper middle-class school, focusing on one first grade class in each school, and within the two schools, on 12 families, over the course of their children's first and second grade school year. The relationship between the school and the working-class family was found to be characterized by separation, as revealed in the following characteristics: (1) parents believe that education is the teacher's responsibility, seek little information, and focus criticisms on non-academic matters; (2) parents never intervene in the child's academic program, so their children receive a generic education; (3) such activities as reading to their children are sporadic and less than teachers would like; and (4) mothers are exclusively responsible for monitoring school activities. The relationship between the school and the upper middle-class family is characterized by interconnectedness, as revealed in the following characteristics: (1) parents believe that education is a shared responsibility between teachers and parents, are well-informed, and are very critical of school and teacher performance; (2) most parents attempt to reinforce the curriculum at home; (3) many parents, particulary the parents of low-achievers, attempt to customize and supplement the child's education by requesting particular teachers and programs or tutoring outside school; and (4) fathers impress teachers by attending school events and taking an active role in making important school-related decisions. A discussion of problems encountered during field work, a list of 430 references, and an index are appended. (FMW)

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